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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the "working culture" of faculty members at a Teacher Education School in Brazil. The study analyzes the teacher educators' values, feelings, and everyday practices. The main objective of the study was to rethink the school organization by taking into consideration the cultural and symbolic practices that organize social reality. A consideration of the interference between cultural aspects of the school and its internal dynamics is also presented. (Contains 15 references.) (WRM)

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# A Socio-Anthropological Study of a Teacher Education School in Rio de Janeiro

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**Introduction**

My experience working within educational institutions has showed me that special attention is given to the bureaucratic aspects of the institution, such as well-organized class agendas, to the established order, to the norms and rules. The teachers quite frequently agree to conform to the rules and the behavior expected from the school. The Brazilian school is organized on rational principles, which emphasize order, economy and efficiency, reproducing the knowledge and the culture of the dominant society. The teacher acts as the bearer of knowledge and as a guardian of the established order. Being a bureaucratic organization the school operates according to the logic of command/obedience stressing values such as homogenization, hierarquization, centralization, and utilitarism. This means that the conflict must be avoided. Differences are not accepted.

However, I also saw in some teacher schools that side by side to this bureaucratic/formal face resides the field of the affection among people, relationships involving loyalty, friendship, and solidarity. This perspective of the institutions is not always privileged by the researches.

As Maffesoli (1984) states there is inside institutions an *"illuminated side" - the economic in all senses of the term, that constitutes the object or perspectives of the majority of investigations - and a* ***"shade side"*** *- hidden, made of multiples and small practical situations of everyday life". (P.66).*

In this study, I decided to turn my eyes also to this "shade side" of a role-model school in Rio de Janeiro known for its effort in preparing qualified educators for basic schools. My research dealt with the faculty members of a Teacher Education School. These investigations worked with three aspects of what I call "Working Culture" of those responsible for educating primary teachers. First, I analyzed their **values:** how they see

themselves as teachers, how they evaluate the pedagogic methods of the school, the work of the Board of Directors, and their relation with the school. Second, I studied the **feelings** of these educators toward school and toward their profession. My hypothesis is that the more teachers feel identified with the organization, the more engaged they would feel toward the institution. The third aspect covered by my analysis had to do with the **everyday practice** of these educators.

The main objective of this study was to rethink the school organization taking into consideration the Cultural dimension, which includes the cultural/symbolic practices that organize the social reality. In exploring and interpreting the cultural aspects of this school I intended to evaluate/understand how they interfere in the internal dynamics of the school, maintaining, inhibiting or modifying the social practices adopted by the school.

**Theoretical Framework**

In this research, I used the broad epistemological framework developed by the French sociologist Edgar Morin - the so-called **Complexity Paradigm**. It deals with the **Social Anthropology of the Quotidian,** an approach inspired by the works of Michel Maffesoli *The Sociology of the Quotidian*, and on Morin' s writings on the *Anthropology of Organizations* and on Durand 's research on the *Anthropology of the Imaginary*. The combination of these theoretical lines developed by the Brazilian Paula Carvalho (**The Anthropology of Organizations and of the Education**) has given many clues to this work.

In accordance with the **socio-anthropological** perspective, the school is considered as a socio-cultural system, a symbolic system constituted of groups with a real experience of codes, norms and action systems. Through the **culture, it** is possible to establish relations among men in society and to organize social life. **Culture *is*** considered the circuit that links the "symbolic, codes and norms **systems" to** the "symbolic **practices of the everyday life".** In Morin' s (1984, p.41) words, **Culture is a system that allows to communicate themselves - dialetizing themselves- a constituted knowledge and an**

**existential experience.** In other words, *Culture* is the *"norm"(patterns of behavior) and* the *"life"*. The **Anthropology of the Organization and of the Education,** by Paula Carvalho (1990), is an organizational perspective of the theory and of the practice in its institutional effects. It points to the symbolic dimension of the discourse and to the action of a specific organization. It rethinks the school-organization in the sphere of the symbolic and educative practices in relation to the broader socio-cultural and organizational "imaginary". It makes possible to analyze the culture of the educational organizations seeing them as mediators of the reproduction and the reinterpretation of the dominant culture through the groups in their everyday life in the educational organization.

**The inquiry - a construcivist approach**

This study made use of qualitative methodology applying it to a role model school in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This school has around 130 teachers and 800 students. Each year around 200 youngsters graduate from it and go to work in primary schools (public or private). From 1993 to 1995, I conducted ethnographic methods (observation of rituals, participation in meetings, parties, etc.) capturing moments that characterize the life of this school. During the period I worked there, I kept a closer relationship with a group of 15 teachers. My eyes and ears were always opened to catch the words, the gestures and the emotions revealed in the everyday life of the school. An ethnographic diary captured those moments. The techniques used to apprehend the cultural/symbolic dimension of the school were: The Archetypal Test of Nine Elements (AT- 9) combined with interviews, questionnaires, life stories and testimonies of experiences. To analyze the culture of this school and reveal its "imaginary" dimension I adopted the **Culturanalyzis of Groups** proposed by the Brazilian educator Paula Carvalho. It is a socio-diagnostic instrument that allows the researcher to analyze the culture of groups taking into consideration two poles: the **Technical** - the rational pole, directed to codes, rules and norms; and the **Affective pole** - the "non rational" side, turned to feelings, to the desire, and to the real life in the institution. It is important to state that these poles are not in opposition to each other. This

approach considers the cultural/symbolic function as the one responsible for the epistemological relation between **Nature and Culture.**

The culture of the group was interpreted/analyzed around some significative themes that lead to teachers' identifications with the school. They are: 1. The tight order, high discipline and organization of the school; 2: The invention of the "tradition" of the school; 3. The "high standard" (quality pattern) of the school; 4. The good functioning of all sectors; 5: Clean, beautiful and pleasant environment; 6. The *pleasure* to work in that school; 7. The high evaluation of the Teacher Education (school); 8.The value of the Teacher as a profession; 9. Solidarity. I considered that these themes form the **culture of this school** because they were part of almost all teachers' discourse in the interviews conducted by me. In addition, they represent the differential point between this school and others.

**The Scenary: lights and shadows**

I worked many years at that school. Its concept of "good" educational institution motivated my decision to be a teacher of that "house". It was indeed a different school among the majority of State schools in Rio de Janeiro. Everything was well organized, very clean, a warm space to be engaged to. I don't work there anymore. However, today, I saw how I did not know that school, how so many things I did not see there, at that time. In addition, how would have been better if I saw it as I see it today. My studies related to **Culture and Imaginary** opened my eyes, my ears and my feelings towards the world around me... so to this academic act, I remembered of it. I came back there, to try to understand it more deeply, either to study its normative aspects as well as to observe its everyday life.

Three years ago I began to rehearse my entry in that "stage". By recalling my past experienced there, I asked me some question, such as: What makes Julia Kubitscheck

School be different from other schools? At what point the "afective" characteristic of this school has contributed to an oganic administration ? At what extension the maintenance of the **tradition** in the school environment fosters the traditional pedagogy? What are the teachers' feelings towards the profession and the school? What do they think about the day-to-day life in the school? How people relate within the school? The teacher profession represents a value among the members of the school? Does the paternalistic pattern of management foster, or inhibit, the teachers' growth and their relations in the institution?

These questions pointed out the avenues to this research/study. I tried to understand and to answer them during my study. As this school is very rich of images, symbolism, myths and rituals, I used the ritual process to present and analyze the culture of the school. Some themes, as was stated before, are object of the majority of teachers' speech. They also represent the "brand" of its difference. We can take into consideration: *the tradition, the order, the discipline and the high and tight oganization of the school, the high standard of the school, cleaness, teacher's valorization, freedom to work, pleasure and protection.*

Júlia Kubitscheck is a school of tradition expressed by the maintenance of the order and high discipline well established and delineated so allowing it to insert itself in history, bringuing the past procedures to the present time. The discourse, the symbol and the rites preserve it under this perspective. The ordinary speech heard in Júlia School is that **it is a good school much more in function of the myth created around the figure of a former principal that deviced, fourten years ago, a rigid structure that has still a great influence nowadays.** It is the strenght of the important role performed by the transmission of a social memory. It is the project of its "founder" that is the reference point in the scenary of the school. In the words of many teachers, **an institutional myth, the "Big Father"-rigid, severe but a person who supported those teachers who did a great job.** The rituals are very much praised by all in the school and I realized that they sustain the tradition of this school, they transmit the cultural codes that harmonize the school, they organize the space and the time of the groups . Pieces of the teachers' speech

about rituals express their importance to the school and testify the understanding of its meaning. The conception of ritual as understood by those teachers are quite similar to the functions assigned to it by some experienced writers on this subject.[1] Their ideas about rituals are related to: belongness, continuity, conservation, human relation, responsibility, emotion, link, maintenance of "status quo", point of meeting...

I quote some of their words:

**The rituals are very old, Newcomers cerimony, Spring Party, Teachers' Week, Teachers' Day, Farewell Parties at the end of each year. They exist since the creation of the Teacher Education Schools and the students like them. They are moments of great emotion. (teacher S.)**

**The rituals give a sense of belongness, they foster greater responsibility, they touch the emotional. (teacher M.)**

**The school is not just the classroom... other spaces have also important meanings – the benches in the playground, the small tables under the ladder the secretary room... they are meeting points, they are school symbols. The rituals support Júlia School's status quo, an institution of resistence. (teacher G.)**

**Teacher Education Schools maintain many rituals. They try to reaffirm their proud...the students wear the blue and white uniform, they sing school authems, they try to leave under a myth. (teacher L.)**

To better oganize my analysis I grouped the rituals, as a manifestation of the imaginary that they express, following Bernstein's tipology (1971), but without the preocupation of a rigid characterization, since that ritual is an ambiguous word that provokes a variety of interpretations.

[1] See Bernstein (1971), Jung (1964, 1989), Kertzer (1988), Turner (1969), McLaren (1992).

I'll start explaining the *consensual and differential riths* that in accordance to Bernstein (1971) are

*"Important instruments of interiorization and of strenghtenin gthe social order, they assure the continuity, the order, the maintenance of the boundaries and the control of ambivalences. They recriate the past in the present and project it towards the future. The They confer the identity avoiding the questioning of its values and the social order" (p. 227).*

Three cerimonies in Júlia School can, in a certain way, characterize themselves as consensual and diferentias rites: **The Ritual of Acceptance of a Teacher to join the school, the Cerimony of Incorporation of Newcomers Students and Julia's Birthday Party.** The words of Norma, vice – principal, are relevant:

**The entry of a teacher to join tha faculty members of the school also follows a ritual and we talk about the philosophy adopted by the school. We emphansize that it is a Teacher Education School and that here we work hard. The teachers that accept the rules get into the "climate" and work happily here. The duty of a principal is to give support but also to call for results. A very important thing is the school environment – we offer comfort to them. Everything works well. Besides we have a group of teacher of high quality ... they wear the 'school T-shirt' and do a serious job.**

We understand here the preocupation to give continuity to " Júlia's High Quality Pattern', Júlia Kubitscheck School's tradition **of better school, better teachers**. It is the tradition promoting continuity through the **imaginary of the order,** that reinforces the **dependency presupposition** so well articulated in the school, so well assumed by the colletive acceptance of the norms, rules and patterns of behavior incorporated in the **imaginary of security.** It represents the dream of the "boss", good and strong , the image of its founder that endures and that is a guarantee of the group survival. This **entropic**

**pattern** of organization, a system of rules while a system of control, is not understood by the teachers as coercive, but protective. Remembering Pagés (1990), a protection of the system of rules, appears ideologically necessary to the group survival as well as to the survival of the structure of this school.

Voices are heard in that sense.

**The professor Araken (the first principal of the school – the founder) was a very importan person here. He wanted everything fuctioning very well. Everybody says that he was authoritarian, but he had all the right to behave in that way because if he did not act so, the school would not work. He was rigid, good, sympathetic. He was very rigid but as all administrator ought to be. He had authority. A healthy relation was estabilished. This school is a jewel, beautiful, clean, well organized, diferent from the others. I have pleasure to work here.**

The group is so structured around the "Ego Ideal" (of his founder/protector); it is the imago of the group's narcisic omnipotency that is invested and in that way justifies the pressures exercised. The cerimonies, the riths because of their capacity to foster emotion, revitalize and renew the compromise related to the instituted values. **Julia's Birthday Party** is also celebrated with a lot of joy, a mass, anthems and speeches.

The **Cerimony of Incorporation** of the newcomer students is a moment of great emotion. It means acceptance, abnegation, knowledge, agregation, interiorization of order, a kind of change of status - the students are incorporated to, now they are members of Júlia Kubitsheck School. The strenght of this dramatic scene embraces everybody, students and teachers, producing an "organic solidarity, an effect of great emotion.- to students and to teachers. To the latter, a space-time that revigorates the profession, an appraisal of Júlia School (of himself- maybe a groupal illusion). To the students the recognition of the value of the teacher profession and the knowledge of the social relations in the school environment. At that occasion, the difficulties of the profession are

forgotten and re-affirmed values such as abnegation, its messianic character, its social importance. Again, the collective conciousness appears around the instituted values. The ritual touches **the emotion** but works also towards **the order**. It provokes the new generation the commitment to preserve the order and maintain the organized, clean, respectable and warm environment (of Júlia School). The anthems, the flags, the parade, the speeches at the same time that they evoke heroic symbols such as soberany, gorification, purification, also evoke a strenght of cohesion around the school as a "house" – of studying, a sweet home, the hope of the country. I see here a perspective of a synthesis of the symbolic organizational dynamic harmonizing **nature** and **culture.** (the norm and the life). In Durand's (1989) words: **the synthesis is not a unification, but coherence, the respect to differences, to oppositions** (p. 239).

It's part of Julia School's tradition the celebration of the **Teacher's Week.** Seminars, meetings and a Lunch Party are deviced. The school walls are ornamented with the students messages to the teachers. As usual the audio-visual sector prepares a poster to honour the school teachers. The year I was at the school doing my reaearch the image portraied was a caricature of a teacher and of a student. The teacher,was represented as a big man wearing gown and cap, with a strange look, a big nose, an enormous mustache and a dumb smile. The student's image looked like a stupid little girl wearing the school uniform, coloured shoes and a red-ribbon on the top of her head. The teachers and the students wrote severe critics and put behind the poster. It caused a big polemic because it was seen as a resistance ritual. Here are some teachers and students' messages: **The teacher has a strange face . He looks like a clown or something worse. Th student looks like a dumb. The teacher is a magic box – he has many faces , he is a social worker, a psychologist, a mother, a father... Please, see the teacher nose... Big nose (Pinóquio). The teacher's yellow smile is very realistic! We know that to be a student/teacher is not a great merit. But there was no need to draw a doll with a dumb face.** The poster brought out the denunciation. It was taken out of circulation. During the Lunch Party the principal talked to the teachers, referred to the dificult moment they are facing as teachers and invited them to invest in friendship, in the comon knowledge. She

finished her speech praising the force of love, the force of working together. The principal didn't face the "disorder", the conflict. She appealed to the emotion. This ritual expressed the function of the rite that to Maffesoli (1984) **is to aggregate the individuals in groups where the games of love and hate, in a misterious "alquimia", conduct to what we can call harmony** (p.161). The principal demonstrated to the group an expression of emotional care (mystic) in a moment of crisis and an heroic support advocating the force of the love to help the continuity of their honest, devoted and silence work. The order was estabilished and the emotion(from the ritual) spoke louder.

Besides the cerimonies, the day-to-day small rituals practiced in the school present expressive symbolism. The arrival at the school, the Secretary room, the benches in he playground, the ladder. These spaces ritualized are points of **(re)union** - the place becoming itself a space of acquaintanceship. As Maffesoli (1996) states: **... the ethos linked to a space... through small ritual of everyday life, places where it's possible to recognize ourselves, the identification with the others... emblematic places, spaces of sociality, full of affection and common emotion.**(pp. 258-69)

Júlia School maintains these spaces, providing cerimonies and parties. The Graduation Cerimony, The Graduation Ball, The End of The Year Parties, among others, give the school a different tone and rhythm. They allow the union of bodies and hearts. They are ryths that **celebrate and fortify solidarity** (Maffesoli, 1979, p. 46)

The study of the imaginary of a group of Júlia School's teachers showed me the role the fantasy performs in the action of the teachers. The images got from the study of the teachers' imaginary, through the Archetypal Test of Nine Elements - AT-9 present archetypical answers, which deep meaning give instruments to understand their ways of thinking, feeling and acting in the Júlia School site. By this, I mean that the teacher's path is one between the norm and the life, between the teacher's **subjectivity** and the **objectivity** of the culture.

In general lines, the exam of the group of teachers' protocols (tests) shows a strong trend to life, to a peaceful fight towards their objectives. The rituals presented here, in a certain way, express also a structure of harmonization of the opposites. A convenient harmony, in this case, of the differences, of the oppositions. This school is mystic and heroic at the same time, it fights to maintain the order and needs peace and warmness.

The **tradition** of Júlia School is sustained by its rituals. These rituals act on the teachers by their capacity of touching the **emotional** and also by their function of working to the **order.** In this sense, Júlia is a school that presents an imaginary of **heroic structure** that reinforces and assures the continuity of the estabilished "order". This has to do with **the rituals of elevation and of purification**. In some teachers' words: **The fuction of the principal is supervise, he/she has to make request for results... in order to make things work you have to state rules. It's very important to maintain the tradition.** Júlia is also a school that provides a pleasant space – a house, a "home", a protective and warm environment, whose symbolisms ,of **mystic structure**, are linked to the notions of protection, warmness and security. A great number of teachers said: **Júlia is different from other schools, it is clean. It has a lake, fish... It has plenty of room, it is well organized Eveything works well. I have pleasure to work here.** Because of this, Julia presents a hybrid image to its teachers, in other words, it is a school that searches for its permanent ascension, glory, light and singularity.

The order is legitimated by all in the school (principal, teachers, students) as its big "flag", what puts itself on the top. The disorder is not accepted and contradictory voices are not heard, they are repressed by the saying: **here everything works well, we are the best school.** The teacher, as a person and as a professional is praised in the school. But the teacher feels the decadence of the profession, the lowering of status, the low income. They are very happy in Julia School because they are recognized, they work comfortably- the pleasure is a strong point in Júlia School. But they also express dissatisfaction related to the lack of a collective work. Some teachers claim that there is more emphasis on the bureaucratic organization than to the pedagogy. They recognize the motherlike/fatherlike

organization structure of the school that assumes the position of providing a pleasant environment(motherlike) but with the condition of respecting the norms and the rules established (fatherlike) Here is its hybridism. This school knows well how to cope with the order. But what about dealing with the disorder – with the new, the different? The school has still a lot to learn., but it is trying.

**Final Considerations**

The study revealed a value system absorbed by the school members. They consider the accomplishment of the established order a condition to maintain the school symbolic "High Standard" ("Quality Pattern") of good functioning and they also refer to the pleasure to work with freedom in a pleasant, beautiful and well equipped environment. One can see here the coexistence of Prometeu (symbol of the progress) and Dionysus (symbol of the pleasure). The prometeic myth seems to revive in the group's desire to have internal security and well being. The cohesion force of this group is linked to the symbolism that represents the notions of protection and security. The imaginary of this group is organized around potential vectors of internal centralization for one side, and the search for transformation, and renewal for the other. Innovations are seen as unbalancing the "peaceful" and "affective" scenery of the school.

The study of cultural aspects of organizations can encourage reflection about how organizations function and how people - in our case the teachers - live their life within organization. Through the knowledge of the culture and the imaginary of a group of teachers, it is possible to reach the understanding of the school structure, its basic proposals, so that one can look for new/alternative forms of organization.

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